

SOUTHWEST COORDINATING GROUP (SWCG)

October 6, 2003 Meeting Minutes

MEMBERS PRESENT: Bill Waterbury (Vice-Chair), Willie Begay, Jeff Whitney, Bob Lee, Bryan Swift, Nancy Neskaukas, Pam McAlpin, Dugger Hughes

NOT PRESENT: Kirk Rowdabaugh (Chair)

GUESTS: Don Geesling, John Waconda, Mary Zabinski, Chuck Maxwell, Bob Lineback

The meeting began at 0900, October 6, 2003.

Minutes for the 7/31-8/01 meeting were reviewed and approved, except for the statement pertaining to IC involvement on training needs. This was delayed until the meeting in December.

TYPE 1 TEAM FUNDING

Jeff requested the SWCG consider developing a structure to provide funding to Type 1 Teams. The SWCG decided to table the discussion until the next meeting.

PREVENTION COMMITTEE

Committee continues to be actively working on standardized position descriptions, mitigation, WUI, FIREWISE issues and projects. Meeting minutes are being placed on the Prevention Committee website. A charter was presented to the SWCG for final approval. Jeff suggested the SWCG review the charter and to continue to task the committee with keeping goals in sight and moving forward. Bill stated that much of the work Rick Rietz (R03) was working on before he left has been placed on the shoulders of the Committee. This may mean utilizing the Committee during the fire season for bringing on Prevention Teams. Rick's position remains open and will be filled upon the approval of the FS Regional Office restructuring.

The SW REC has four working committees on issues related to interagency fire management. The SWCG would like to see the Prevention Committee involved with this effort to insure their efforts are in concert with the REC's. This is especially true for coordination of closures and restrictions among multiple agencies.

Willie Begay stated he would like to make sure that the Fire Investigation training efforts remain on everyone's radar screen. He would like everyone to realize there are investigators out there that are available for use.

INFORMATION COMMITTEE

Bill discussed Media Access Guidelines. He stated the First Amendment Coalition, along with local print and video media, recently met with the Chief of the Forest Service and the R3 Regional Forester, in Tucson. The Coalitions major concern is the potential for not having better access to the fireline, such as having people with engines and crews. The Chief stated he didn't have a real issue with media access. Rose Davis, NIFC External Affairs, has been assigned to this issue at the national level. Bill and Jim Payne will talk with the R3 Regional Forester to ascertain the level at which the SW REC would like to be involved. In the current SW Draft Media Access Guidelines, it is stated that the Agency Administrators are given the ability to make local decisions pertaining to media access. The SWCG decided this issue

should have national direction, needs to have recommendations taken forward to the SW REC, and get understanding and acceptance from Agency Administrators.

A second issue related to the media is the Red Carding process. Bill stated the FS has no authority to issue Red Cards to reporters, only the authority to Red Card FS personnel. He did state the agencies have a duty and responsibility to provide training for media personnel on fire safety. Bob suggested more interaction with the media, similar to the way the aviation group is working with them. The SWCG decided the SW REC should be aware of existing guidelines.

Mary Zabinski, presenting on behalf of the Information Committee, provided the Coordinating Group with the Committees existing charter, requesting three changes to be made. The SWCG approved the changes.

THREE-TIER VS FOUR-TIER DISPATCH SYSTEM

Primary discussion revolved around the IRMT Report recently published. More specifically, the SWCG discussed the steps that would be needed in order to change the current system to a three-tier system. Due to the complexity of the issue, a task group was formed to develop alternatives. The task group will include Pam, Dugger, Willie, Brian, and one member from the one of the Zones. They will meet November 13 in Albuquerque.

SOUTHWEST FIRE USE TRAINING ACADEMY (FUTA)

Bob Lee led a discussion on roles, responsibilities, and chartering of the SW Fire Use Training Academy. The Southwest BLM State Offices and R3 Forest Service Regional Office have put a lot of funding into FUTA. However, it seems a National Interagency Prescribed Fire Training Steering Committee Charter is being circulated incorporating the SW FUTA into it along with the National Prescribed Fire Training Center in Tallahassee, Florida. Nationally, the SWCG is being told to stay involved in the chartering process, but the national charter doesn't say anything about SWCG involvement. Right now, there seems to be little direction on FUTA and whether the SWCG will have oversight or not. The SWCG decided to build on what was heard at the recent FUTA Review and Closeout, and send a copy of the SW FUTA Charter to the national offices to ensure they are in agreement on each group's role. Karen Michaud, NM-BLM State Office, will compile the Charter for SWCG review.

INTERAGENCY HOTSHOT CREW CERTIFICATION

The Southwest Regional Office of the BIA informed the SWCG that the Zuni Interagency Hotshot Crew has completed their required training and are now a fully qualified IHC. The R3 Forest Service Regional Office also informed the SWCG that the Mt. Taylor IHC has completed their training, too. Each Regional Office would like to know if there is a formal process for certification by the SWCG. The SWCG has a process, but would like to follow the guidelines coming out in the next update of the National Interagency Hotshot Crew Guidelines. However, the SWCG decided to move forward with their approval process prior to the updated national guide. Thus, the SWCG will review all documentation related to the crews and will present the crews with a plaque commemorating their achievements.

DEVELOPING A SW FIRE USE MANAGEMENT TEAM

Tom Zimmerman, R3 Fire Director, requested from the SWCG their thoughts on developing and sponsoring a SW Fire Use Management Team. If interested, the Rocky Mountain Area would provide the equipment and the SW would provide the personnel. Options for the SWCG are to develop a National team or a SW team. Bill

stated the R3 Forest Service is definitely looking into developing a team, but would like to know if the other agencies are interested in being involved. The SWCG agreed there is a strong need for Fire Use teams and believes this should be pursued. However, before a final agreement is made, the SWCG would like to see an organizational review or concept paper on how the team(s) would fit in the Southwest, especially when it comes to competition for resources and smoke management if a number of fire use fires are underway at the same time.

FIRE WEATHER

Chuck Maxwell discussed several issues pertaining to the fire weather program in the Southwest Area. He gave a presentation on the new Smoke Modeling Program implemented at the Rocky Mountain Research Station, provided information on a proposed interagency program to develop standards for fuel moisture collecting, reporting and modeling, and distributed a paper regarding the accuracy/validity of National Weather Service (NWS) products. There is a meeting November 12-13 with the NWS to discuss working relationships and products. Prior to the meeting Chuck will write a letter for SWCG signature to the NWS. The letter will cover several of the issues that need to be resolved.

SWCC FUNDING

Bob Lee led a discussion on funding and staffing levels in SWCC. The USFWS is going to fund an Assistant Center Director position. The announcement should be on the streets shortly. As a result of creating the Assistant position, the BLM-NM will remove the currently funded Coordinator position and fully fund the Center Director position.

The next meeting of the Southwest Coordinating Group will be November 14, 2004 to be held in Albuquerque.

The meeting adjourned at 1700, October 6, 2003.

/s/ Kirk Rodabaugh

Chair

Southwest Coordinating Group

* Minutes for this meeting will be finalized at beginning of the next meeting.

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